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President Ben Shelly Designates \$6 Million for Spring Scholarships

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly has finalized plans to make available \$6 million to ensure that Navajo Nation scholarship recipients will receive their scholarship funding.

"We need to make sure our students have money for spring semester of college. We are going to do everything we can to ensure that our Navajo students receive the scholarships they were promised in a timely fashion," President Shelly said Monday morning.

The money will be made available for students through the Office of Navajo Scholarships and Financial Assistance.

In addition, plans to create a more efficient scholarship disbursement are already on the discussion table for the Shelly-Jim administration.

The Shelly-Jim administration was glad to have the "Navajo Nation Sales Tax Distribution Reform Act of 2012" go through the signature process which started from the Tax Commission office.

The Honorable Dwight Witherspoon is the primary sponsor for legislation that would distribute 10 percent of sales tax funding toward Navajo scholarships.

The legislation is currently making its rounds of approvals from various committees.

Several months ago President Shelly strongly advocated for the initiative when it started the signature process.

"If this legislation passes, it will provide up to \$4 million in extra scholarship funds annually for Navajo college students," President Shelly stated.

The Office of the President and Vice President addressed scholarship-funding delays on Jan. 3 and are appreciative of Naa'bik'ayati Committee's recent directives, which coincide with the administration's plans to address the issue.

During a Monday morning meeting, key governmental staffers finalized a plan that will have scholarship funds released to the schools before the end of this week.

"Simply, we are asking for your cooperation to do what we need to do for our students," Vice President Rex Lee Jim said addressing key staffers assigned with creating and making payments for scholarships.

About \$12 million was paid to undergraduate scholarships last year and the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance estimates that \$6 million will cover the cost of spring semester scholarships.

The scholarship office has been waiting on the Bureau of Indian Affairs to complete their scholarship budget amounts and disburse funding to the office.

However, ONNSFA representatives in the meeting said there were additional processes that added to the delay.

Last fall, according to Title 2 code, ONNSFA needed to gain approval of three Navajo Nation Council committees, whereas in prior years, only two committees needed to approve the budget, which prolonged the office delivering a budget to the BIA.

"We need to work together," Vice President Jim said.

Council Delegate and Health, Education and Human Services Chair Jonathan Hale said he would present the difficulties pertaining to Title 2 and the scholarship office to the Government Reform Committee.

"We want to create the best opportunities for our young Navajo minds to prosper. They are the future of the Navajo Nation and we need to take care of them," President Shelly said.

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